

## **Findings of the Report of the American Institutes of Research (AIR)**

Education Code Section 44372 (h) required that the Commission, with the Committee on Accreditation, jointly design an evaluation of accreditation policies and their implementation, and jointly select an external evaluator to conduct the evaluation in accordance with the *Accreditation Framework*. The Commission has fulfilled this mandate. In March 2003, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) issued its final report on the Evaluation of the *Accreditation Framework* Policies and Procedures. The purpose of this study was to examine the policies and procedures found in California's *Accreditation Framework* and *Accreditation Handbook*, the Commission's processes and procedures for conducting accreditation visits, the preparation of the Board of Institutional Reviewers (BIR) for site visits, and the question of whether the current process implemented by the Commission allows for a fair and productive review that supports program and institutional improvement.

It is important to note that the design of the study and the collection of these data preceded implementation of the SB 2042 standards and other numerous reform measures. While these recommendations and suggestions are important for consideration, they are limited in utility.

### **Phase I**

The AIR study was comprised of two phases. The first phase included: 1) a review and analysis of pertinent documentation; 2) observation of accreditation visits; 3) observation of new BIR member orientation and training; 4) development of site visit profiles; 5) interviews with key informants; 6) an analysis of the *Accreditation Framework*; 7) development of databases related to site visits; and 8) observation of COA meetings. The first phase resulted in identification of some emerging themes and issues that were recommended for further exploration. Three recommendations resulted from the first phase of the project. These recommendations are:

1) *Clarification of Standards* - AIR reported that their review of documentation and initial interviews revealed a prevailing difficulty in discerning the standards by which an institution is being evaluated. They recommended that the information about standards be located and labeled clearly as associated with specific programs within an institution using consistent terminology and numbering systems.

2) *Development of Reports* - AIR recommended that clearer guidelines be given to institution representatives developing self-studies or accreditation reports, and that accreditation team members be reviewed to determine how to accommodate the lack of consistency and transparency in documents related to the site visits.

3) *Documentation and Recordkeeping* - AIR recommended that recordkeeping and document maintenance procedures at the CCTC be reviewed and revised to

ensure that all materials could be easily located, checked out as needed, and returned.

## **Phase II**

Face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and surveys comprised an important aspect of Phase II research. AIR surveyed three distinct groups: CCTC Board of Institutional Reviewers (BIR) who participated in accreditation site visits; higher education representatives involved in the accreditation process; and district staff -- graduates, master teachers, and employers of candidates at institutions accredited in 2000-01 and 2001-02. In addition, Phase II included an analysis of the *Accreditation Framework* and *Accreditation Handbook*; case studies of institutions undergoing the accreditation process, database development, a profile development database, data analysis, interviews with COA members, and attendance at state meetings.

## **AIR Phase II Findings and Recommendations**

In general, the AIR summarizes its findings as follows:

The overall sentiment of stakeholders is that the peer review of education preparation programs effectively serves the goals and objectives of accreditation as defined by the process and procedures in the *Accreditation Framework* and *Handbook*. Even though the process of preparing for accreditation is long and arduous, it provides IHE's an invaluable opportunity to self-examine their programs and practices to allow them to identify weaknesses and improve their programs through a self-reflective process. The process allows the accreditation team of peers to make an informed assessment of the educator preparation programs from the self-study documentation and on-site review, and to produce a report and recommendations for the COA's consideration. (AIR Report, page 10)

The research conducted by AIR in the second phase centered around four general questions. In its final report, AIR responds to those questions with key findings as well as related recommendations. These findings and recommendations are reproduced verbatim below.

***AIR Research Question 1. Are the policies and procedures outlined in the Accreditation Framework and Accreditation Handbook and implemented since 1997 yielding the kind of information that is in keeping with the avowed goals, purposes and functions of a professional accreditation system?***

### ***Key Findings:***

1. The CCTC process, as dictated by the Accreditation Framework, is based upon the high standards that reflect the theoretical and practical goals and

direction of the various subsets of the education profession. With the implementation of the Teaching Performance Assessment (TPA), based upon the SB 2042 Teaching Performance Expectations, the CCTC is moving even more closely toward the performance outcomes that have become prevalent within the profession.

The CCTC partnership with National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) reflects a strong commitment to assist California institutions seeking national accreditation. This commitment is reflected in the recently renegotiated partnership between the Commission and the National Council. Challenges to implementing this partnership include issues of alignment between CCTC and NCATE standards and the subjective personal interaction between state and national teams in data collection and decision making.

***Recommendations related to standards:***

- 1) Standardize the processes related to transitions to new standards through new language in the *Accreditation Handbook*.
- 2) Review the need for maintaining Option 3, General Program Standards.
- 3) Attempt to standardize the formats for documentation required of IHEs, specifically for the self-study report.
- 4) Begin a dialogue with IHEs regarding appropriateness of standards for non-traditional models or programs as to whether they consider the standards as they currently exist to be appropriate and valid measures of quality of their institutions.

***Recommendations regarding training and orientation***

- 1) Provide more and ongoing orientation for COA members.
- 2) Provide more training and professional development to CCTC staff than is currently available to them.
- 3) Include a historical perspective of past performance in the accreditation process into team and COA decision-making considerations.

***Other related recommendations:***

- 1) Amend the *Framework* to allow for greater sanctions to be placed upon low performing programs.
- 2) The "Concerns" part of the team report needs to be reconsidered by the COA and the format for the report should be revised so the team members will clearly understand the expectations of the COA for the report.

***AIR Research Question 2 – Do BIR members feel adequately prepared for their role as peer reviewers to achieve the goals of the system? Do they believe that the policies and procedures under which they are operating enable them to achieve the goals of the system?***

### ***Key Findings:***

- Peer review through site visits by the BIR is highly valued by both IHE representatives and BIR members. Using peers at the K-12 and IHE levels to judge whether and to what degree programs have met the standards is a core element of the *Accreditation Framework*.
- The criteria for team selection are critical to the validity of the accreditation review process, and the *Framework* is clear about these criteria in terms of team size, expertise, and diversity. However, the unavailability of BIR members and/or the unavoidable loss of team members at the last minute may result in a team with one or more members who are poorly and/or insufficiently prepared. This could result in team members who are unable to effectively fulfill their responsibilities in the CCTC's accreditation process, reduce the effectiveness of the team as a whole, and interfere with the CCTC's ability to meet *Framework* requirements regarding the criteria for team selection.

### ***Recommendations regarding the preparedness of peer reviewers:***

- 1) Strengthen team training, particularly in the areas of interviewing.
- 2) Intensify the orientation of accreditation teams.
- 3) Evaluate BIR members' skills post-visit and provide feedback.
- 4) Adopt better technology to allow CCTC staff to more effectively recruit team members.

***AIR Research Question 3 – Do those from institutions of higher education and their graduates who have been involved in accreditation reviews feel that the system allows them ample opportunity to provide the information necessary for a fair and productive review?***

### ***Key Findings:***

- The intensity and brevity of the accreditation visit is a significant factor in respondents' perceptions of the CCTC accreditation process. IHE representatives, team members and CCTC staff report that the process leaves them physically and mentally exhausted.
- The frequency of the accreditation cycle – occurring approximately every five to seven years – is a significant element in the Commission's system of accreditation, and exists to ensure that institutions maintain quality.

### ***Recommendations regarding the opportunity to provide information for a fair and productive review:***

- 1) Standardize the formats for documentation required of IHEs specifically regarding standards for the self-study report.
- 2) Provide more and better orientation for institutions new to accreditation.

- 3) Encourage IHEs to develop electronic document rooms in addition to better -organized, hard copy document rooms.
- 4) Conduct candidate interviews when students are available.
- 5) Develop annual surveys for newly credentialed individuals and their employers to provide an additional source of objective data to inform the accreditation system.

***AIR Research Question 4 – What evidence is there that the accreditation review process and the information provided through the review is being used to support program and institutional improvement?***

***Key Findings:***

- Although time-consuming, the process of self-reflection to prepare the institutional self-study is highly valued by IHE representatives and seen as one of the chief benefits of the accreditation process.
- The quality of the data available for use by teams making judgments about institutions' performance against the standards can vary significantly, and this variation affects the validity of those decisions and the teams' overall recommendations to the Committee on Accreditation.
- The accreditation team report is the key piece of data the COA uses to make its decision on an institution's accreditation status. However, the various parts of the report can vary substantially in quality, interfering with the Committee's ability to make its decisions with full confidence in the team's recommendations. The intensity of the accreditation visit often results in conditions that are not conducive to the production of high quality team reports. In addition, IHE representatives are often unprepared for the presentation of their institution's report before the COA, or feel unable to prepare themselves for the interview before the committee.
- The *Accreditation Framework* purposefully ignores past institutional performance against the standards in its accreditation visits; yet the addition of this historical perspective could lead to a deeper, more effective measurement of institutional improvement over time.

***Recommendations regarding the review process supporting program and institutional improvement.***

- 1) Offer more assistance in the development of self-study documents.
- 2) Alter the *Framework* to allow IHEs to provide data about program improvement over time.